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THE
S P E E C H

OF THE 3

RIGHT HONOURABLE

WILLIAM PITT.

[Price ONE SHILLING.]

1783

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THE
S P E E C H
OF THE
RIGHT HONOURABLE
W I L I A M P I T T,
IN THE
H O U S E
OF
C O M M O N S,
ON
FRIDAY, FEBRUARY 21, 1783.

L O N D O N:

Printed for J. DEBRETT, (Successor to Mr. ALMON)
opposite Burlington-House, Piccadilly, MDCCLXXXIII.

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S P E C I M E N

Joseph J. Cooke
Providence, R.I.
Dec. 22, 1889

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H O U S E
O F
C O M M O N S.

FRIDAY, FEBRUARY 21, 1783.

*L*ORD John Cavendish moved the
following Resolutions in the House
of Commons:

I. That the public faith hath been
pledged to the maintenance of the
treaties with France and Spain, and of
the

the Provisional Treaty with the United States of America, this House will inviolably adhere to these treaties, and faithfully support his Majesty in maintaining them.

II. That this House will concur with his Majesty, in improving and rendering permanent the blessings of peace, to the encouragement of trade, and the advantage of his people.

III. That in recognising the Independence of the United States of America, his Majesty had acted according to the powers vested in him for that purpose, and conformably to the sense of Parliament.

IV.

IV. *That in the above treaties greater concessions had been made to the enemies of this country, than they had any right to expect, considering the relative and comparative state of our affairs and theirs.*

V. *That this House will concur with his Majesty in making such compensation to such of the American Loyalists, as shall appear on due examination to have deserved it.*

After a long debate, Mr. Fox rose in support of the Fourth, and concluded his speech in about two hours. Mr. William Pitt, then Chancellor of the Exchequer, rose in reply; and with a vehemence of eloquence, which reminded

*mind*ed the old Members of the late Earl of Chatham, seized all the faculties and attention of the House. Such united powers of voice and manner, such flashes of wit and depth of reasoning, were never before united in that House. This sketch can barely pretend to describe from memory, some faint outlines of that astonishing composition.

Mr. SPEAKER,

REVERING as I do, the great abilities of the honourable gentleman who spoke last, I lament in common with the House, when those abilities are misemployed, as on the present question, to inflame the imagination, and mislead the judgment.

I am

I am told, Sir, “ *he does not envy me
 “ the triumph of my situation on this
 “ day :*” a sort of language which
 becomes the candour of that honour-
 able gentleman as ill as his present
 principles. The triumphs of party,
 Sir, with which this self-appointed
 Minister seems so highly elate, shall
 never seduce me to any inconsistency
 which the busiest suspicion shall pre-
 sume to glance at. I will never engage
 in political enmities without a pub-
 lic cause : I will never forego such en-
 mities without the public approbation ;
*nor will I be questioned and cast off
 in the face of this House, by one vir-
 tuous and dissatisfied friend.** These

B

Sir,

* This is supposed to allude to Sir C— W—y,
 Mr. P—ys, &c.

Sir, the sober and durable triumphs of reason, over the weak and profligate inconsistencies of party violence; these, Sir, the steady triumphs of virtue over success itself; shall not only be mine, in my present situation, but through every future condition of my life: triumphs which no length of time shall diminish; which no change of principles shall ever fully.

The fatal consequence of Tuesday's vote, which I then deprecated and foretold, is already manifest in this House, and it has been thought on all sides requisite, to give a new stability to the peace, which that vote had already

already shaken. But the proof which the present motion is about to establish, *that we are determined to abide by this peace*, is a declaration, that we have examined the terms, and have found them *inadequate*. Still less consistent is this extraordinary motion with the language of Tuesday. It was then urged, that no sufficient time had been allowed us to determine on the articles before us; and in the short space of two days we are ready to pass a vote of censure on what we declare we have not had leisure to discuss. This, Sir, is the first monstrous production of that strange alliance, which threatens once more to plunge this devoted country into all the horrors of another war.

It is not, Sir, an exception to any single article, if well-founded exceptions should really exist, that ought to determine the merits of this treaty.—Private interests have their respective advocates, and subjects may be easily found for partial complaints. But private interests must bend to the public safety—what these complaints may prove, is indeed yet unknown—For whilst the honourable gentleman alone is describing, with so much confidence, the distresses and dissatisfactions of trade, she herself is approaching the Throne, with the effusions of gratitude and affection.—The honourable gentleman, who spoke last, has fairly stated the terms by which the merits of this peace are
to

to be decided—*the relative strength and resources of the respective powers at war.*---I will immediately meet him on this issue.

I shall begin, Sir, with a most important subject, the state of the British navy; and shall refer myself for proofs of what I assert, to the papers now lying on your table.—This appeal, Sir, to solid and authentic documents, will appear the more just and necessary, when I acquaint the House, that a noble Lord, from whom the honourable gentleman professes to receive *his* naval informations, has varied in his statements to the Cabinet, no less than twenty fathoms of the line.

STATE

STATE of the NAVY.

We are informed, Sir, from the papers before us, that the British force amounted nearly to one hundred sail of the line.—Many of these had been long and actively employed on foreign stations. With diligent exertions, six new ships would have been added to the catalogue in March. The force of France and Spain amounted nearly to one hundred and forty sail of the line, sixty of which were lying in Cadiz harbour, stored and victualled for immediate service. Twelve ships of the line, including one newly built, by the United States, had quitted Boston harbour under Vaudreuil, in a state of perfect repair.

pair. --- An immense land armament was collected at St. Domingo. --- These several forces, Sir, were united in one object, and that object was the reduction of Jamaica. --- Who, Sir, can suppose with serious confidence, that island could have long resisted a regular attack, supported by seventy-two sail of the line? Admiral Pigot, after his reinforcement from Europe, would have commanded a fleet of only forty-six sail, and it has long been acknowledged in this House, that *defensive war must terminate in certain ruin*. Would Admiral Pigot have undertaken at this time *offensive* operations against the islands of the enemy? Those islands on which Lord
Rod-

Rodney, flushed with victory, could not venture to attempt an impression? Would Admiral Pigot, Sir, have regained by arms what the Ministers have recovered by treaty? Could *he* in the fight of a superior fleet have re-captured Grenada, Dominique, St. Kitt's, Nevis, and Montserrat? Or might we not too reasonably apprehend the campaign in the West-Indies would have closed with the loss of Jamaica itself, the remnant of our possessions in that part of the globe?

Let us next consider our situation in the East. --- A mere defensive resistance, however glorious, had entitled Sir Edward Hughes to the thanks of this House; --- but his success, if
it

it may be termed a victory, had not prevented the enemy from landing a greater European force than we actually possess in India; and who at this instant are in conjunction with Hyder, subduing and desolating the Carnatic.

The prospect is by no means brightened when we look forward to the probable operations in the Channel, and in the Northern Seas, during the course of the ensuing summer. --- Thirteen new sail of the line would at that time have been added to the fleet of France; and the Dutch force, as it has been accurately stated by a great naval officer, * in this debate,

C

* Commodore Keith Stuart.

bate, would have amounted to twenty-five sail of the line. --- What accession the Spanish force would have received is not sufficiently known.--- It is enough for me to state, the fleets of Bourbon and of Holland would have doubled ours in our own seas. --- Should we have seized the intervals of their cruize, and poorly paraded the Channel for a few weeks, to tarnish again, by flight, the glories of the last campaign? --- Or should we have dared to risque the existence of the kingdom itself, by engaging against such fearful odds?

What were the feelings of every one who hears me? (what were my own

own feelings it is impossible to describe) when that great man Lord Howe set sail with our only fleet; inferior to the enemy, and under a probability of an engagement on their own coasts? --- My apprehensions, Sir, on this occasion, however great, were mixed with hope; I knew the superiority of British skill and courage might outweigh the inequality of numbers. --- But, Sir, in another quarter, and at the same instant of time, my apprehensions were unmixed with a ray of comfort. ---- The Baltic fleet, almost as valuable as Gibraltar itself, for it contained all the materials for future war, was on its way to England; and twelve sail of the line had been sent out

from the ports of Holland to intercept them. --- Gibraltar was relieved by a skill and courage that baffled superior numbers; and the Baltic fleet was, I know not how, miraculously preserved. One power, indeed, the honourable gentleman has omitted in *his* detail: --- But the *Dutch*, Sir, had not been disarmed by the humiliating language of that Gentleman's ministry. They were warmed into more active exertions, and were just beginning to feel their own strength. They were not only about to defend themselves with effect, but to lend ten sail of the line to the fleets of France and Spain. --- Here, Sir, let us pause for a moment of serious and solemn consideration!

Should

Should the Ministers have persevered from day to day, to throw the desperate die, whose successes had won us only a barren though glorious safety, and whose failure in a single cast would sink us into hopeless ruin? However fondly the ideas of national expectation had diffused themselves amongst the people, the Ministers, Sir, could entertain no rational hopes. --- Those columns of our strength, which many honourable gentlemen had raised with so much fancy, and decorated with so much invention, the Ministers had surveyed with the eye of sober reason. --- I am sorry to say, Sir, we discovered the fabric of our naval superiority to be visionary and baseless.

I shall

I shall next, Sir, with submission to the right honourable gentleman who presides in that department, state, in few words, the situation of the army. --- It is notorious to every gentleman who hears me, that new levies could scarcely be torn, on any terms, from this depopulated country. It is known to professional men, how great is the difference between the nominal and effective state of that service ; --- and, astonishing as it may appear, after a careful enquiry, three thousand men were the utmost force that could have been safely sent from this country on any offensive duty. --- But, I am told, Sir, the troops from New York would have supplied us with a force equal to the demands of every intended expedition.

dition. --- The foreign troops in that garrison we had no power to embark on any other than American service; --- And, Sir, in contradiction to the honourable gentleman who spoke last, and to that noble Lord whose language he affects to speak in this house, no transports had been prepared, or could have been assembled for their immediate embarkation. --- Where, Sir, should they have directed their course when they were at length embarked, but into the hazard of an enemy's fleet, which would have cruized with undisputed superiority in every part of the western world.

No

No pressure of public accusation, nor heat of innocence in its own defence, shall ever tempt me to disclose a single circumstance, which may tend to humiliate my country. What I am about to say, will betray no secret of state; — it is known, for it is felt throughout the nation. — There remains at this instant, exclusive of the annual services, an unfunded debt of thirty millions. — Taxes, Sir, the most flattering, had again and again been tried, and, instead of revenue from themselves, had frequently produced a failure in others, with which they had been found to sympathize. — But here, Sir, I am told by the honourable gentleman who spoke last, *other nations would have felt an equal distress* ;
good

good God! to what a consequence does the honourable gentleman lead us! — Should I, Sir, have dared to advise a continuance of war, which endangered the bankruptcy of public faith; a bankruptcy which would have almost dissolved the bonds of government, and have involved the State in the confusion of a general ruin? Should I have ventured to do this, because *ONE of the adverse powers MIGHT have experienced an equal distress?*

The honourable gentleman who spoke last has amused the House with various statements — on the different principles of *uti possidetis* and restitution. The principle of those state-

D

ments

ments is as false as it is unexpected from him : — did his great naval friend acquaint him with the respective values of Dominique and St. Lucia? — that Lord, who in his Majesty's councils had advised, and perhaps wisely, a preference of the former. The value of Dominique, Sir, was better known to our enemies ; and the immense sums employed by them in fortifying that island, prove, as well its present value, as their desire to retain it. That honourable gentleman has, on all occasions, spoke with approbation of the last peace : was St. Lucia left in our hands by that peace, the terms of which we ourselves prescribed? — or was St. Lucia really *so impregnable* as to endanger
all

all our possessions at the commence-
of the present war?

It would be needless for me, Sir,
to remind the honourable gentleman
who spoke last, of any declarations
he had made in a preceding session :
— professions from *him* so antiquated
and obsolete, would have but little
weight in this House : — but I will
venture to require consistency for a
single week, and shall remind him of
his declaration in Monday's debate,
*“ that even this peace was preferable
to a continuance of the war.”* Will
he then criminate his Majesty's Minis-
ters by the present motion, for pre-
ferring what *he* would have preferred?
or how will he presume to prove,
that

that if better terms could have been obtained, it was less their interest than their duty to have obtained them.

Was this peace, Sir, concluded with the same indecent levity, that the honourable gentleman would proceed to its condemnation? Many days and nights were laboriously employed by his Majesty's Ministers in such extensive negotiations; --- consultations were held with persons the best informed on the respective subjects; ---- many doubts were well weighed, and removed; --- and weeks and months of solemn discussion gave birth to that peace, which we are required to destroy without examination; that peace, the positive ultimatum
from

from France, and to which I solemnly assure the public, there was no other alternative but a continuance of war.

Could the Ministers, thus furrouned with scenes of ruin, affect to dictate the terms of peace? --- and are these articles seriously compared with the peace of Paris? --- There was, indeed, a time when Great Britain might have met her enemies on other conditions; and if an imagination, warmed with the power and glory of this country, could have diverted any member of his Majesty's councils from a painful inspection of the truth; I might, I hope, without presumption, have been entitled to that indulgence. I feel, Sir, at this instant, how much
I had

I had been animated in my childhood by a recital of England's victories : --- I was taught, Sir, by one, whose memory I shall ever revere, that at the close of a war, far different indeed from this, she had dictated the terms of peace to submissive nations. This, in which I place something more than a common interest, was the memorable æra of England's glory. But that æra is past ; she is under the awful and mortifying necessity of employing a language that corresponds with her true condition. The visions of her power and pre-eminence are passed away.

We have acknowledged American independence--- That, Sir, was a
need-

needless form---The incapacity of the noble Lord who conducted our affairs---The events of war, and even a vote of this House, had already granted what it was impossible to withhold.

*We have ceded Florida---*We have obtained Providence and the Bahama islands.

*We have ceded an extent of fishery on the coast of Newfoundland---*We have established an exclusive right to the most valuable banks.

*We have restored St. Lucia, and given up Tobago---*We have regained Grenada, Dominica, St. Kitts, Nevis, and Montserrat, and we have rescued
Jamaica

Jamaica from her impending danger. In Africa we have ceded Goree, the grave of our countrymen; and we possess Senegambia, the best and most healthy settlement.

In Europe we have relinquished Minorca, kept up at an immense and useless expence in peace, and never tenable in war.

*We have likewise permitted his most Christian Majesty to repair his harbour of Dunkirk---*The humiliating clause for its destruction was inserted, Sir, after other wars than the past---But the immense expence attending its repair, will still render this indulgence useless; add to this, that Dunkirk

kirk was first an object of our jealousy, when ships were constructed far inferior to their present draught--- That harbour, at the commencement of the war, admitted ships of a single deck; no art or expence will enable it to receive a fleet of the line.

In the East Indies, where alone we had a power to obtain this peace, we have restored what was useless to ourselves, and scarcely tenable in a continuance of the war---

But we have abandoned the unhappy Loyalists to their implacable enemies---

Little, Sir, are those unhappy men befriended by such a language in this House; nor shall we give much as-

E

fistance

sistance to to their cause, or add
 stability to the reciprocal confidence
 of the two States, if we already im-
 pute to Congress a violence and in-
 justice, which decency forbids us to
 suspect.---Would a continuation of
 the war have been justified, on the
 single principle of assisting these un-
 fortunate men? Or would a conti-
 nuance of the war, if so justified, have
 procured them a more certain in-
 demnity? Their hopes, Sir, must have
 been rendered desperate indeed, by
 any additional distresses of Britain;
 those hopes which are now revived
 by the timely aid of peace and recon-
 ciliation.

These,

These, Sir, are the ruinous conditions to which this country, engaged with four powerful States, and exhausted in all its resources, thought fit to subscribe, for the dissolution of that alliance, and the immediate enjoyment of peace.---Let us examine what is left with a manly and determined courage. Let us strengthen ourselves against inveterate enemies, and reconcile our antient friends. ---The misfortunes of individuals and of kingdoms, that are laid open and examined with true wisdom, are more than half redressed---and to this great object should be directed all the virtue and abilities of this House. ---Let us feel our calamities ; let us bear them too like men.---

But, Sir, I fear I have too long engaged your attention to no real purpose; and that the public safety is this day risqued, without a blush, by the malice and disappointment of faction.---The honourable gentleman who spoke last has declared, with that sort of consistency that marks his conduct, “ Because he is prevented from prosecuting the noble Lord in the blue ribbon to the satisfaction of public justice, he will heartily embrace him as his friend.”

So readily, Sir, does he reconcile extremes, and love the man whom he wishes to persecute---With the same spirit, Sir, I suppose he will cherish this peace too---*because he abhors it.*

—But,

---But, Sir, it is not this treaty un-
 attainable by them, it is the Earl of
 Shelburne alone whom the movers of
 this question are desirous to wound---
 Great and dignified as I know that
 noble Lord to be in the conviction
 of his own upright mind, he would
 little regret retreating from this storm
 of faction, with which the wisest
 statesmen have been for a time op-
 pressed.-- Withhold the present mo-
 tion, and establish in reality that
 peace for which we have so long
 panted in vain; other modes may
 be found to criminate those abilities
 which ye hate---But if the bane-
 ful alliance is not already formed, if
 this ill-omened marriage is not al-
 ready solemnized, I know a just and
 lawful

lawful impediment, and, in the name of the public safety, *I here forbid the banns.*

With regard, Sir, to myself, whatever may be the result of this night's vote, the part I have borne in concluding the present treaty will ensure me well-earned and durable honours, I shall receive the support of virtue and independence in this House, I shall receive the satisfaction of my own mind, I shall receive the public approbation.

I have no disposition, Sir, to decline any national service which may be performed with honour, nor am
I placed

I placed so high by fortune as to despise the honest wages of office---
 But I shall retire from these without regret, if such a step shall contribute to the public quiet. I shall not threaten the repose of my country, and erect, like that honourable gentleman, a fortress and a refuge for disappointed ambition---Whoever may succeed me in his Majesty's councils shall receive my earnest approbation, whilst he pursues the dictates of wisdom and of virtue --- The loss of fortune will give me but little disquietude---

*Laudo manentem, si celeres quatit
 Pennas, resigno quæ dedit, —*

—probamque

Pauperi em sine dote quaero.

THE END.

AR S Sep 15 1879 XVL

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